

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF
ELECTION IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY AND THE BOOK
OF JONAH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLE STUDY IN THE
CHINESE CHURCHES IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA TODAY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is the writer's attempt to propose a legitimate methodology of bible reading for the Chinese churches in South-East Asia.

Chapter one is an attempt to understand the concept of election in Deuteronomy with special emphasis on the particularistic view of Israel as the "chosen people" of Yahweh.

Chapter two is a study on the concept of election in Jonah, with special focus on its universalistic perspective of Israel's mission to the world, particularly in view of the understanding of the world as God's creation.

Chapter three is a comparative study based on chapters one and two. It is this writer's attempt to focus and highlight the diverse and multiple traditions in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy and Jonah served as a paradigm for us to investigate the diverse traditions within the canon.

Chapter four is a survey of the current methodology of bible reading in the Chinese churches in South-East Asia. This writer focuses particularly on the method of harmonization by the Chinese writers and preachers, who represent the Chinese approach to the Scriptures.

Chapter five brings the research to its true focus -- a proposal for a new methodology of bible reading in the Chinese churches in South-East Asia. This writer's approach is to reject the method of harmonization. His approach also goes beyond the mere acknowledgement and celebration of the bible's pluralism. This proposal is to take pluralism in the bible seriously and to compare and contrast the difference on the vantage point of Yahweh's relationship to the universal reality. His method is that which does not reflect Yahweh's universal reality has to be judged and to be placed at the service of that which reflects Yahweh's universal reality. This method is to go beyond what the bible says and what it does not say. Our task is to interpret the bible critically from a center and background found within it, i.e., from a perspective that reflects God's relationship to reality in the most universal and fundamental way. This method, this writer believes, will enable us to bring the "canon within the canon" to our Chinese christians.

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPT OF "ELECTION" IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

In this chapter we shall discuss the concept of election in the Book of Deuteronomy. We shall also discuss the traditio-historical problem of the concept. Our attention is two-fold, namely, on the word and on the conceptual understanding in the Old Testament.

A. ISRAEL AS THE ELECTED PEOPLE

רָחַץ meaning "to choose" is generally used by Deuteronomists to denote Yahweh's initial act by which he comes into relation with his people. It denotes Yahweh's choice of a group, that is, his choice of the people of Israel out of all the nations.¹ In Deuteronomy, the word is used very frequently with Yahweh as the subject and Israel as the object.² In

¹E. Jacob defines "election" in a rather broad term. According to him, "every intervention by God in history is an election". See E. Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p.201.

²G. Quell, ἐκλέγομαι in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), IV, 149, has shown us that out of the 164 times in the usage of the word in Old Testament, in 92 instances Yahweh is the subject, another 13 times the passive רָחַץ the election by God. In other instances, the word is for human decision and the object of choice is Yahweh's law or his will, or anything that belongs to God. The only passage in the Old Testament where Yahweh is the object of man's election appears in Joshua 24:15, 22. It would be wrong to conclude from this rather unique text that the election of Israel by Yahweh is met by an election

other words, it is Yahweh who, out of his own initiative chooses Israel and not vice versa. The basis of election, as one may say, never lies on the one who is chosen, but exclusively on the one who chooses. In Deuteronomy election is precisely this: that Israel knows herself to be wholly dependent upon the grace of Yahweh. Let us now examine a few passages regarding Israel as the chosen people of Yahweh in the Book of Deuteronomy:

For you are a people holy to Yahweh your God; Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth (Dt.7:6).

And because he loved your fathers and chose their descendants after them, and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power (Dt.4:37).

Yet Yahweh set his heart in love upon your fathers and chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day (Dt.10:15).

For you are a people holy to Yahweh your God, and Yahweh has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth (Dt. 14.2).³

of Yahweh by Israel. Contra L.Köhler's position. According to Köhler, the election in the Old Testament is a reciprocal relationship: Yahweh chooses Israel, Israel chooses Yahweh; both do it in complete independence. See L.Köhler, Old Testament Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p.68. J.L. McKenzie is probably right by pointing out that the text signifies the response of Israel to Yahweh's election rather than the election of Yahweh by Israel. See J.L. McKenzie, "Election" in Dictionary of the Bible (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1965), p.227.

³To the knowledge of this writer, the above are the passages concerning Yahweh's choice of Israel as a people. Other passages in Deuteronomy on Yahweh's choice of Israel are related to "the place which he will choose" (12:14,18,26; 14:25; 15:20; 16:15,16; 17:8,10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11; cf. Josh 9:27) or choice of Levitical priests (18:5; 21:5) or choice of

In the above passages, we notice that Dt. 7:6 and 14:2 have something in common. Both speak of Israel as "holy"⁴, "chosen" and Yahweh's own possession.⁵

In both texts, *וְהָיָה* is used only as a subordinate clause and not as a proclamation. Israel is commanded to defeat the Canaanites, to destroy them utterly, to make no covenant with them, to make no marriage with them, to show them no mercy, and then the reason is given as:

For you are a people holy to Yahweh your God; Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.

Israel is set apart from the other nations to stand in a special relationship with Yahweh. No reason is given anywhere in these two texts about Yahweh's special choice.

Both Dt.10:15 and 14:2 also speak of Yahweh's choice of Israel as his special people. The authors of Deuteronomy⁶

king (17:15; cf. I Sam.10:24; I Kg.8:16; 11:34) or choice of tribe (12:5). Since our focus is on the election of Israel as a people, we shall leave out these passages in our discussion.

⁴See below, p.16.

⁵See below, pp.17-18.

⁶It is widely accepted that the Book of Deuteronomy is not homogeneous, but has, in its present form, undergone revision from its primitive shape. Deuteronomy is, so to speak, a result of a process of growth. This writer prefers to speak of "authors" instead of "author", contra R.H. Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), p.179; see W.O.E. Oesterley and T.H. Robinson, Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament (London: SPCK, 1955), p.45, A. Weiser, The Old Testament (New York: Associa-

seem to attempt to answer the question: "why this choice"?⁷

The reason is given here as: because Yahweh had a delight in their fathers and loved them (Dt.7:8; 10:15). It is here that the Deuteronomists attempt to relate the concept of election to the patriarchal narrative.⁸ They knew that it was not because Israel was good, nor was it because Israel was great in numbers (Dt.7:7). In Deuteronomy 9:4ff the people were definitely warned against thinking that they were chosen because of their righteousness. It was because God loved

tion Press, 1961), p.128f, O.Eissfeldt, The Old Testament (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p.225, G. Fohrer, Introduction to the Old Testament (New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), p.172f, B.S. Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament As Scriptures (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp.205ff.

⁷The Old Testament writers as a whole never understand the reason for this choice. Here the Deuteronomists attempt to find a reason for it.

⁸There are two independent traditions of election of which one relates the origin of Israel's election to the Mosaic revelation, the other relates it to the patriarchal time. In Dt.7:8 (cf.4:37), the two traditions are combined by the Deuteronomists. E.Jacob argues that the patriarchal tradition is later. He finds the almost total absence of patriarchal tradition from the pre-exilic prophets. According to him, this is a pointer to their later origin. See Jacob, p.205. H.W. Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation In the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p.151, however, sees that the appeal to the exodus tradition by the prophets (e.g., Hosea 11:1, 13:4; Jer.2:2f) is to a historic event in which the redemptive work of Yahweh established a new relation between him and Israel, thereby constituting an election in which deed is more important than word. For the Deuteronomists, however, word is the supreme divine revelation. G. von Rad has shown us that the Deuteronomic history is full of word and fulfillment, see G.von Rad, Studies in Deuteronomy (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), pp.78-81; also see below, pp.13f.

them (Dt.23:5). The reason for God's choice of Israel is to⁵ be found in God alone, and not in Israel, not in anything they were nor in anything they had done.⁹

In short, the election of Israel is absolutely out of the divine grace, or in Calvin's phrase, the "irresistible grace".¹⁰

B. TRADITIO-HISTORICAL PROBLEM

It is doubtful, as G.E. Mendenhall puts it, that Yahweh's choosing Israel as a people is not demonstrably earlier than the Deuteronomy.¹¹ According to him, "none of the Old Testament sources before Deuteronomy refers to Yahweh's

⁹See N.H. Snaith, "Chosen" in A Theological Word Book of the Bible (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p.45. The insistence of Deuteronomy that election is the result of God's initiative, not of the characteristics of humanity, is also taken up in the New Testament. In the word of Jesus, "you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (Jn.15:16), cf. I Cor.1:27-28; Jas.2:5; Matt.22:1-4. In the New Testament, election is also the act of God, not based on any inherent superiority of the elected, but grounded in the love and grace of God.

¹⁰H.H. Rowley, The Biblical Doctrine of Election (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), p.39, is certainly wrong in saying, "it was because Israel was especially suited to the purpose of revelation which he cherishes". No such thought is permitted to argue against the graciousness of the divine act.

¹¹See G.E. Mendenhall, "Election" in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), II, 76. This present writer is indebted to Prof. Knierim for pointing out in an oral communication the possible long tradition of the concept of election.

choosing a people."¹² It is, however, certainly not inappropriate to state that the theology of election first takes on its full significance in the Book of Deuteronomy where it is developed with great emphasis. That Yahweh took Israel as his peculiar people, according to von Rad,¹³ is a "very very old" idea.

In this section, we shall examine the traditio-historical problem of the concept of election. We shall study the clusters of concept as well as the field of words which are related to the idea of election.

1. Clusters of Concept.

a. The Patriarchal Tradition. The notion of election was dominant in Israel's faith right from the very beginning. It is central in the theology of the Yahwist (tenth century B.C.) in the story of the patriarchs.

The whole tradition concerning Abraham and the other patriarchs of the nation (Gen.12-50) should be viewed from the perspective of belief in an election. The promise made to Abraham that his descendents would become a nation, possess the land of Canaan, and be a blessing to other nations (Gen.

¹²Ibid., p.76

¹³G.von Rad, Old Testament Theology (London: SCM Press, 1975), I, 178.

12:1-3 etc.) conveys most of the ideas implicit in a theolo-⁷
gy of election, even though the special terminology of
"choosing" is not employed.¹⁴

b. The Covenant Tradition. The idea of election of Israel is also intimately related to that of the divine covenant, as it has been observed by many scholars.¹⁵ Köhler would even subordinate the doctrine of election to that of the covenant.¹⁶ John Bright has shown us that the notion of covenant is indeed rather early, and not to be understood as a late concept.¹⁷

The so called covenant formula "I am Yahweh your God and you are my people" (Ex.6:7; Jer.11:3-4; 31:33; Ezek.37:26-

¹⁴Word is closely related to the concept. Sometimes the word may not be found but the concept is there. The story of Fall and Sin in Genesis 2 is a good illustration.

¹⁵See for examples, G.E. Wright, Old Testament Against Its Environment (London: SCM Press, 1950), p.54ff; P.van Imschoot, Theology of the Old Testament (Paris: Desclee, 1965), p.245; R.E. Clements, Old Testament Theology (London: Marshall, Morgan, 1978), p.96.

¹⁶Köhler, p.66, cf.p.44f.

¹⁷Bright has pointed out that the tribal order of Israel's earliest period was a covenant order. According to him, Israel was made up of elements of heterogeneous origin. She was able to survive and maintain her identity as a people for some two hundred years, without even a central government or machinery. He argues that the reason why the various components could bind together was none other than by the cohesive force of a solemn pact, that is, a covenant or a treaty in the name of Yahweh. See John Bright, History of Israel (London: SCM Press, 1972), p.145ff.

27) is certainly to be understood in the context of covenant. It is a two-sided idiom that expresses quite explicitly the mutual relationship between Yahweh and Israel. This formula comes closer to our discussion. A great many scholars would agree that the covenant between Yahweh and Israel is not on the equal footing. G.E. Mendenhall has shown us the unequal footing of the covenant relation in the light of the suzerainty-vassal treaty.¹⁸ It is the stronger party who proposes the covenant. In the same way as election, the covenant is due only to the initiative of Yahweh, and it is in no way the reward of Israel's merits. The striking parallel asserting the divine initiative and grace forces us to conclude that somehow the idea of election is intrinsically related to the concept of covenant.

c. The Exodus Tradition. In many of the Old Testament passages, particularly the prophetic literature, the exodus tradition has been linked with the idea of election. In the words of Jacob, "no one could seriously contest that election is closely linked with the work of Moses".¹⁹ It was through Moses that the people received their consecration as God's people.²⁰ As we have mentioned earlier, it was the

¹⁸G.E. Mendenhall, Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

¹⁹Jacob, p.205.

²⁰Bright, pp.123, 153ff.

prophets who appealed to the exodus tradition.²¹ For ins-⁹
tance, Hosea represents Yahweh as saying, "when Israel was
young, then I came to love him and out of Egypt I called him
by my son" (11:1). With this we may compare "I am Yahweh
your God from the land of Egypt"(13:4). For Jeremiah, Israel's
disloyalty is due to her ingratitude and forgetfulness of her
deliverance: "They did not say, 'where is Yahweh who brought
us up from the land of Egypt....' "(2:6; cf.Ps.116:1ff; Isa.
43:16ff; Ezek.20:5; also the post-exilic psalm 105:5-10).²²

d. The Davidic Kingship of Jerusalem Tradition. The
Davidic kingship of Jerusalem, and the divine dwelling place
upon Mt. Zion,²³ were certainly not unrelated to the broader
concept that Israel as a whole was chosen by God. It is the
king of the Davidic line who was chosen by Yahweh to reign in
Zion. Both the historical books of Samuel (cf.I Sam.16:8ff;

²¹See above, p. 4, n.8.

²²The passage already cited from the Book of Deutero-
nomy brings the deliverance from Egypt through Moses into the
relation with the election in Abraham. It declares that it
was in loyalty to his oath to the patriarchs that Yahweh
brought them out. "It was just because Yahweh loved you, and
because he kept the oath which he swore to your fathers, that
Yahweh has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed
you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh the
king of Egypt" (7:8).

²³The election of Mt. Zion is expressed in I Kg.8:12-
13; Pss.78:69; 132:14. The election of David and his sons
is referred to in terms of the Davidic covenant (I Sam.7).
Both acts of divine choice are said to be "forever".

II Sam.6:21; 16:18) and the psalms (78:79; 89:19) presuppose the existence of a royal ideology connected with the Davidic dynasty which held that the king was Yahweh's chosen one.

It seems that Deuteronomy is quite familiar with the older tradition of the divine election of Israel's kings and of Yahweh's sanctuary (cf. Dt.12:5,11; 17:15). We shall come to this point later.

2. Field of Words.

a. יָדָע . The word יָדָע , as W. Zimmerli²⁴ has pointed out on the basis of Amos 3:2 "you only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities", is related to בְּחֹרָה , the chosen people. In Gen.18:19, the word "know" is used synonymously with the word "chosen" (see RSV footnote). In Jeremiah 1:5, the usage of the word יָדָע comes close to this notion. Here Yahweh says to the prophet "before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (cf. Ex.33:12; Hos.13:5). Here by implication we have the emphasis of Yahweh's knowledge of Israel in distinction from all other nations. The act of Yahweh is to be regarded as out of his free will.

²⁴W. Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology In Outline (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), p.47.

b. **נָקַח** . In Exodus 6:7 we have "... and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God....". This is a statement of the covenant relation. The word **נָקַח** is quite evidently used here in connection with the word election. In I Chron.21:11 and II Sam.24:12 there is a certain degree of synonymity between "choose" and "take".²⁵

c. **אָבָד** . Other concept of election may also be found in the general expression such as the word **אָבָד** in Ex.3:4; 35:30 where we are told that Yahweh calls certain people and entrusts them with a particular task.

Deutero-Isaiah is very fond of this expression. According to Mendenhall,²⁶ since the time of Deutero-Isaiah, the word has become almost synonymous with the word election. Let us examine some passages in Deutero-Isaiah. In 49:1 "Yahweh called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name"; in 48:12 we have "hearken to me, O Jacob and Israel, whom I have called" (cf.54:6).

In these passages Israel has been called by Yahweh to be his chosen people. In Deutero-Isaiah, the call of

²⁵In Dt.4:20 here **נָקַח** is certainly meant "chosen". Here Israel has been chosen by God to be "a people of his own possession" which is a typical expression of election relation in Deuteronomy (cf.7:6; 14:2).

²⁶See G.E. Mendenhall, "Call" in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), I, 490.

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Yahweh, however, is not restricted to Israel only, it also includes the nations (55:5).²⁷

d. Other Expressions. Other related expressions such as הִירְשָׁהוּ, "inheritance", הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהָעָם "peculiar people".²⁸

3. Some Observations.

a. From our study earlier, we can conclude that both in terms of terminology and concept, the idea of election has a long tradition history. Although it is the Deuteronomists who have developed this concept with great emphasis, the concept itself has long existed in the history of Israel before Deuteronomy.

b. What needs to be mentioned here is about the patriarchal tradition and the exodus tradition. Both traditions agree to recognizing the divine initiative which is essential to election. Whereas the pre-exilic prophecy appeals to the exodus tradition in which the redemptive work of Yahweh, that is his deeds, play a vital role, the Deuteronomists appeal to the patriarchal tradition in which the word plays an important role. For the Deuteronomists, the word is the supreme divine revelation. The reason for the

²⁷Although it is true that Deutero-Isaiah is far later than Deuteronomy, but the word קָרָא is used for the call of an individual as in the case of Moses (Ex.3:4) which is commonly regarded as E source.

²⁸See below, p.17.

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election, as we have already observed, is given by Deuteronomists as: because Yahweh had a delight in their fathers and loved them and had kept the oath which he swore to them. Word and fulfillment characterized the Book of Deuteronomy. Throughout the book, we have "Yahweh confirms the word which he swore to your fathers" (1:35; 7:13; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9,21; 19:7; 27:3; 28:11; 31:20 etc.). In some instances, the Deuteronomist combined the two traditions together, such as in the case of Dt.4:37; 7:8.

c. The concept of election which has its tradition history in the ideology of the Davidic monarchy in Jerusalem has been observed earlier. Clements, following the suggestion by Quell, argues that even the word יְהוָה was actually in use from the time of David and his successors who were his anointed rulers over all Israel and that the authors adopted its terminology and applied it to Yahweh's election of Israel as his peculiar people.²⁹ Clements sees a polemical attitude on the part of the authors of Deuteronomy towards the Jerusalem ideology of kingship. Instead of proclaiming the sacral foundation of the Israelite state in terms of the divine election of its monarchy, the Deuteronomists declared that what Yahweh had elected was a people for his own possession, and that it was merely by a concession that this people were

²⁹See R.E. Clements, "Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition", Vetus Testamentum, XV:3 (1965), 305.

themselves allowed to elect a king from among their number.³⁰ What Clements tries to argue is this: that the Deuteronomists were influenced by the Jerusalem tradition, that they formulated their own distinctive concept of Yahweh's election of Israel by using the terminology to describe his choice of the Davidic monarchy in the Jerusalem tradition.³¹ He even goes further and says that the Deuteronomists applied the idea of election to all Israelites as a deliberate counter-balance to the excessive claims of Jerusalem. Instead of proclaiming the sacral foundation of the Israelite state in terms of the divine election of its monarchy, the Deuteronomists declared that what Yahweh had elected was a people for his own possession.

Although Clements' view is plausible, he fails to perceive two things. Firstly, Clements fails to perceive that the political and historical situation of the seventh century B.C.³² plays a vital part in this change of theolo-

³⁰Ibid., p.306f.

³¹See R.E.Clements, God's Chosen People (London: SCM Press, 1968), pp.76-77; also R.E.Clements, God and Temple (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), pp.49ff.

³²As early as 1805 De Wette had proposed a seventh century B.C. date for Deuteronomy in the belief that it was actually the law-book used by Josiah in his religious reforms. Other scholars like von Rad, Studies in Deuteronomy, p.66, R. Frankena, "The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon and the Dating of Deuteronomy", Oudtestmentische Studien, XIV:2 (1965), 122-154, M.Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp.59-154 also assigned the book to the seventh century B.C.

gical emphasis. Here the Deuteronomists seem to warn that¹⁵
the cult and institutions were in no way to save Israel.

Secondly, Clements fails to raise the question: "On what authority and on what grounds did the Deuteronomists stand in opposition to the monarchy?" Such opposition from the Deuteronomists, if understood correctly, is directed against the king himself.³³ Our study has helped us to see that Israel as a chosen people of God has a long and old tradition in the history of Israel. Hence, the Deuteronomists, by declaring that Yahweh had elected a people for his own possession, was actually referring to the Israelite's older tradition. It was precisely on the authority and basis of the older tradition that the Deuteronomists could go against the excessive claim of the election of the monarchy.³⁴

C. THE PARTICULARISTIC CONCEPT

Particularism, according to the Webster's International Dictionary, is defined as "exclusive or special devotion to something particular such as interest, subject, party, sect etc."³⁵ From this perspective, the Book of Deuteronomy is very particularistic, for Yahweh is believed to be basica-

³³This writer is indebted to Prof. Knierim for pointing out this question.

³⁴To the knowledge of this writer, none of the literatures by Clements that we have cited earlier has discussed this issue.

³⁵See Webster's International Dictionary (Springfield: G & C Merriam, 1961), p.1647.

lly and primarily the God of Israel. Israel is particularly chosen to be the people of Yahweh. There is an absolute lack of universal dimension in terms of her mission to the nations in the Book of Deuteronomy. We shall discuss this point later in this section.

It is noteworthy to observe that because of Yahweh's choice, Israel is declared to be a "holy people" (Dt. 7:6; 14:2). The basic concept of holy, *qados*, is separateness.³⁶ Holy, as G.E. Wright³⁷ correctly understands, is used here in a derivative sense. Originally, holiness is a special attribute of God which distinguishes him as God from everything in creation. The phrase "holy people" is indicated strongly in Deuteronomists' understanding of Israel as having a special attachment to Yahweh which distinguished her from all other nations. The people are to be set apart from all their evil environment. Israel shall have no dealing whatsoever with the pagan cultures of Canaan. They shall not indulge in any of the foreign religions or immoral customs (Dt. 7:5; 14:1f, 21).³⁸ In this condition of holiness, an intimate bond is

³⁶ See W. Bauer, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 871.

³⁷ G.E. Wright, "Deuteronomy" in Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), II, 380.

³⁸ Von Rad has claimed that one can actually designate Deuteronomists' program as the establishment of pure Yahweh faith in the agricultural environment of Canaan. See Rad, Studies in Deuteronomy, p. 71.

established between Yahweh and Israel. For Israel, Yahweh will be their God and Israel will be his people. Israel has to keep the commandments and ordinances (Dt.26:17-19). She can in no way violate this relationship of holiness (Dt.28:7-9; cf. Jer.2:3).³⁹

Two more words referring to the relationship of Israel to Yahweh need our attention here. One is "inheritance" נַחֲלָה. As God's chosen people, Israel is also called his "inheritance" (Dt.4:20; 9:26,29; 32:9; cf. Ps.33:12).⁴⁰ The word is commonly used to describe the land of Canaan which Yahweh has given to Israel as their inheritance.⁴¹ However, the Deuteronomists consider Israel as Yahweh's inheritance (Jer.10:16) or possession which could not be taken away from

³⁹According to W.Brueggemann, "A Form-Critical Study of the Cultic Material in Deuteronomy" (Unpublished Th.D. dissertation, New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1961), pp.213, cf.p.220, argued that the choice is conditional, namely, Israel has to remain as a "holy people". This involves keeping community and cult pure, cleaving only to Yahweh, being careful to avoid all contamination and syncretism.

⁴⁰Jack Shechter, "The Theology of the Land in Deuteronomy" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1981), p.63, has shown us that נַחֲלָה describes the hereditary land of the clan (e.g. Gen.31:14; Num.16:14; Josh. 24:28). In the later P source נַחֲלָה is also used to denote the hereditary possession of a clan (e.g. Num.16:14; cf. Josh. 19:49). In none of the above sources do we hear of a נַחֲלָה of Israel as a whole. This is clearly a peculiarity of Deuteronomy. Also see G. von Rad, The Problem of the Hexateuch (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), p.81.

⁴¹See O.J.Baab, "Inheritance" in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955) II, 701-703; also see J. Herrmann, κληρονομία in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), III, 769-776.

him. Yahweh has indeed given special favour to his possession (cf. Jer.12:7-9).

This thought is further amplified by the use of a second word: "peculiar people" אֲנִי־יְהוָה (Dt.7:6; 14:2; 26:18; cf. Ex.19:5; Mal.3:17; I Chron.29:3; Eccl.2:8). "Peculiar" must be understood in its Latin sense derived from peculium which is a technical term denoting the private possession which a slave or child was allowed by parents or master to possess.⁴² Here in Deuteronomy, the meaning can be "people of special possession", that is to say, a people specially treasured by Yahweh. The Hebrew word אֲנִי־יְהוָה is used in the private treasure (of gold, silver etc.) belonging to kings (I Chron.29:3; Eccle.2:8). The LXX rendering τετραπλόημα (I Chron.29:3) illuminate this meaning, "that which is saved or gained for one's own private use or to satisfy one's own personal desire".⁴³ Applied to Israel, this means that she is Yahweh's private, personal and cherished possession, above all other nations of the earth.

In contrast to the Yahwist's epic (Gen.12:3), Deuteronomy says nothing about Israel's relation to the rest of the world as a witness in the purpose of God. Of the three

⁴²S.R. Driver, Deuteronomy (Edinburgh: Clark, 1896), p.100; cf. A.D.H.Mayes, Deuteronomy (London: Marshall, 1979), pp.769-776.

⁴³See Brueggemann, p.222.

elements in the blessing of Abraham in Gen.12:1-3, only the first two, land and posterity are taken up into Deuteronomy. The former being dominant,⁴⁴ and the latter only occasionally appearing as, for example, Dt.1:10ff, while the third, the blessing to the nations does not appear at all.

In its attitude towards other nations, Deuteronomy shows considerable exclusiveness and particularism. Yahweh owns indeed the entire world (since God is one as indicated in the shema in Dt.6:4), but his favour is limited only to the people of his choice. The prophetic truth that Yahweh has the other nations into his fold does not find expression in Deuteronomy.⁴⁵

⁴⁴In Deuteronomy, the possession of the land is the expression of Israelites' status as the chosen people of Yahweh. Both blessing and curse are also spelled out in the context of the land. For when the people desires obedience to Yahweh, he will bless them in the land (Dt.28:8; 30:16). On the contrary, the curse will be the loss of the land (Dt. 4:26; 11:17; 28:21). For the authors of Deuteronomy, to be thrown out of the land and scattered among the nations would be death. Losing the land would be synonymous with the destruction of the nation. See Clements, Old Testament Theology, pp.89,93. Clements even goes further than that and proposes that the land was not only the gift of God's election, but to some extent was also an expression and confirmation of it, *ibid.*, p.94. This insight helps us to understand the hope of exile in Babylon to return to the "land", to rebuild it and to be truly chosen Israel of God.

⁴⁵Once, perhaps, indirectly, in the Song of Moses in Dt.32; cf.32:43, the nations are invited to congratulate Israel on possessing a God like Yahweh. Such invitation, addressed to the nations (cf.Isa.42:10-12; Ps.47:2; 67:1-7), involves indirectly though, Yahweh's dealings with the world at large. Driver, pp.345-348, assigns the Song to the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Mayes, p.393, correctly points out that the nations should be summoned to praise Israel is sudden and unjustified in the context. G.von Rad, Deuteronomy: A

In the Book of Deuteronomy, the promise of Israel's loving God is that she must not fear or be dismayed before the present inhabitants of the land. For just as Yahweh fought for her in the exodus and wilderness wanderings, so he too will fight for her in the conquest when she enters the land and takes it, driving out the enemies before her (Dt. 7:17-24; 20:1-4; 31:3-8). Yahweh appears to be the Divine warrior in Deuteronomy (cf. 23:14), the leader of the amphicyonic hosts, who will not fail or forsake his people until he gives them victory.

And above that, the land she is to occupy will, through the action of Yahweh, be completely vacated by all its former inhabitants, so that Israel may live uncontaminated away from the presence of the nations (see chapter 7).⁴⁶ This opposition towards other nations finds particular expression in the martial character of the book. Israel is precisely the people of Yahweh who is constantly preparing

Commentary (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), p.200 argues that the Song of Moses in Dt.32 belonged to a late date. According to him, the nearness to Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel of the Deuteronomistic phraseology suggests possibly the period of the exile, *ibid.*, p.200. A detailed study of the date, see J.R. Boston, "The Song of Moses: Deuteronomy 32:1-43" (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1966), pp.196-212; also W.F.Albright, "Some Remarks on the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy XXXII", Vetus Testamentum, IX:4 (1959), 339-346.

⁴⁶This is obviously the case with those laws, as in chapter 14:21 which prescribe what is clean and what is unclean for Israel. The whole of the law, as a matter of fact, is directed to the life of a people who has been set apart by God.

for war against her enemies. Religious motives, according to Driver,⁴⁷ sufficiently explains the strong hostile attitude adopted towards the Canaanites (cf.Dt.7:3; 20:18). In chapter 13, people who worship other gods is to be severely punished; they are to be thoroughly destroyed (cf.13:15).⁴⁸ But only an antiquarian reason is assigned for the antipathy displayed towards the Ammorites and Moabites (Dt.23:4-7) and for injunction to exterminate Amalekites (Dt.25:17-19). A more friendly attitude, based upon the recollections of the past, is inculcated towards the Edomites and the Egyptians (Dt.23:8f).

In G.von Rad's view,⁴⁹ the background of the martial spirit is Israel ancient holy war tradition from the time of the pre-monarchic sacral amphictyony. The authors of Deuteronomy are reviving the ancient holy war as a means towards bringing about revival and renewal of the nation in their own time. This may be an adequate explanation against the background of the exclusiveness and intolerance of the Deuteronomic doctrine of Israel, the elected people of Yahweh.

Although von Rad's view is not impossible, we must, on the other hand, take the historical setting seriously.

⁴⁷Driver, p.xxxi.

⁴⁸Clements, God's Chosen People, p.36, sees the brutal act as not so much of Israel's hatred of gentile nations, but a hatred of their religious teachings and practices. If this is so, the reflection of particularism is again evident.

⁴⁹See Rad, Studies in Deuteronomy, pp.45f; also see

Israel's drastic separation from the people and her exclusiveness should be understood in its historical perspective. The Deuteronomists developed their theology after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. Such a catastrophe, as the Deuteronomists see it, was the result of a tolerant syncretism. The Northern Kingdom had tolerated assimilation and was therefore destroyed. Now Judah was about to venture on the same course. Therefore some drastic change has to be taken before it is too late.

We shall also mention about the exclusiveness of the central shrine before we conclude this chapter. In the Book of Deuteronomy, one cannot but feel the demands for the centralization of worship.⁵⁰ The central shrine was, "a place which Yahweh shall choose" (Dt.12:14),⁵¹ and the focal point of Israel's life. Nevertheless, it must always be borne in

Rad, Old Testament Theology, I, 73f.

⁵⁰The law providing for only one place for sacrificial worship, was the basis of the great reform carried out by King Josiah (II Kg. chapters 22-23).

⁵¹There has been a great deal of argument as to the meaning of the phrase "the place which Yahweh your God will choose". On the meaning of the text, see commentaries by Driver, Wright, von Rad. Though the expression is not found elsewhere, it appears likely that a single place is intended here, namely, the centralization of the cult at Jerusalem. The reasons for omission of "Jerusalem", according to J.M. Myers, "The Requisites for Response: On the Theology of Deuteronomy", Interpretation XV:1 (1961), 15, because it would be obvious to the hearers that it alone was appropriate or, possibly, because the mention of the name would appear anachronistic in the general historical milieu adopted in the sermons.

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mind that Deuteronomy demands something more radical by its law of the central shrine. In the amphictyony the central sanctuary did not exclude other local tribal shrines but in Deuteronomy these are prohibited. The reason, perhaps should be understood both religiously and politically. This was the first attempt of centralization of Jerusalem as the place of the sole sanctuary⁵² to the complete exclusion of others.⁵³

From this point of view, it is possible to say that particularism has reached its climax, since Israel is thought to be the imperial nation on earth. Other nations are in no way to worship this one true God who has his temple in Jerusalem. It implies, though not explicitly, that if all the

⁵²Jerusalem is viewed as the "city of God", "his holy city", "the city of the great kings"(Ps.48:11), it is a city which "he chose" and which "he loves" (Ps.48:11), it is the city which Yahweh has "desired for his habitation"(Ps.132:13). It is the site of the temple and the home of the ark of God (II Sam.6; I Kg.8). It has a strong connection between the theme of the election of Zion and that of the election of David.

⁵³This position is contra to the position held by Wright, Deuteronomy, pp.324,410; Rad, Deuteronomy, pp.16f. Both von Rad and Wright hold that during the period of tribal federation, the tribes of Israel worshipped at a central sanctuary, or more precisely, sent representatives to participate in such worship. Thus, the argument is that the Deuteronomic law is the revision of an old custom, deriving from the days prior to the monarchy. The difficulty arises from such an argument is that the ark was believed to be kept in the sanctuary. How can one, then, account for the movements of the ark from one place to another (cf.I Sam.6:15; II Sam.6:1-15)? The argument of several sanctuaries seems to be preferable and convincing. Y. Kaufmann is undoubtedly right in pointing out that there had been other great cult sanctuaries before in Israel, for examples at Bethel, Dan, Shechem, Gilgal and Gibeon. See Y.Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp.173ff.

other nations on the earth were allowed to worship this one true God Yahweh, they shall have to flow to Jerusalem to call upon his name there (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-5; Zech. 9:1-17.)⁵⁴

This is what we mean by particularism in the Book of Deuteronomy. What we have here in this book is the exclusion of other nations in the purpose of God's salvation. There is nothing mentioned about Israel as the light to the nations, neither do we have any idea of Israel as the servant of God. The Deuteronomists do not understand election for a pan-human existence. Yahweh is understood basically and primarily as the God of Israel, and not as the God of all nations. Of course, this does not mean that for the Deuteronomists, Yahweh is not the God of all nations at all, since he is perceived to be the only one true God. This is the deficiency in the theology of election in the Book of Deuteronomy. We shall now proceed to discuss a different view of election, namely, a more universalistic view which is represented by the Book of Jonah.

⁵⁴The influence of the concept of election into Christianity is unquestionable. The concept itself has been taken over by the New Testament writers (see for examples, Gal. 4:28ff; 6:16; Eph. 2:11, 19; 3:6) and the early church which has claimed herself as the heir of election, though in a somewhat different form, namely, in a much more inclusive and universal approach. For details, see Rowley, Doctrine of Election, chapter on "The Heirs of Election", pp. 139-174.

CHAPTER II

THE CONCEPT OF "ELECTION" IN THE BOOK OF JONAH

In this chapter we shall study the concept of election in the Book of Jonah. Our special concern will be focused on the universalistic concept of its message. Before we proceed any further, we shall study the structure of the book.

A. THE STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

The Structure of the Book of Jonah can be divided into the following as shown:¹

I. First commission and consequences	1:1-2:10
A. Commission and reaction	1:1-3
1. Yahweh's commission	1-2
2. Jonah's reaction	3
B. Consequences	1:4-2:11
1. Jonah and mariners on ship	1:4-16
a. Situation	4-6
b. Lot's story	7-10
c. Decision	11-15a
d. Resolution	15b-16
2. Jonah in fish	2:1-10
a. Yahweh-fish-Jonah	1
b. Jonah's thanksgiving	2-9
c. Yahweh-fish-Jonah	10
II. Second Commission and consequences	3:1-4:11
A. Commission and reaction	3:1-3
1. Commission	1-2
2. Reaction	3
B. Consequences	3:4-4:11
1. Jonah and Nineveh	3:4-10

¹The above structure is taken from Prof. Knierim's class lecture, Jan. 23, 1981.

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a. Jonah's message	4
b. Nineveh's reaction	5-9
1) people	5
2) king	6-9
a) Personal	6
b) Proclamation	7-9
c. God's reaction	10
2. Jonah and Yahweh	4:1-11
a. Dialogue	1-4
1) Jonah	1-3
2) Yahweh	4
b. Plant story	5-8a
c. Dialogue	8b-11
1) Jonah	8b
2) Yahweh	9a
3) Jonah	9b
4) Yahweh	10-11

B. THE STORY OF JONAH

The author of Jonah presents his message in the guise of a story concerning a prophet who lived during the days of Jeroboam II (II Kg.14:25).² The story tells us that prophet Jonah is commissioned by Yahweh for the first time to go to Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian empire, and to preach that the city will be destroyed if they do not repent. "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me"(1:2). Jonah's

²Outside the book the name "Jonah" is only found in II Kg.14:25. He is represented as the son of Amittai and as an inhabitant of Gath-hepher, a place also mentioned in Josh. 19:10,13 as in the territory of Zebulun. During the reign of Jeroboam II, his prophecy concerning the restoration of its full territory to Israel was fulfilled, but it was not stated whether he himself lived during the reign of Jeroboam II or earlier. Considering the rareness of the name Jonah and Amittai, neither of which recurs outside these passages, it is fairly obvious that the "Jonah" of Jonah 1:1 is meant to be identified with Jonah of II Kg.14:25.

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immediate reaction is a refusal to obey the command. Instead, he rather chooses to flee. He simply refuses to preach to the Assyrians who have been responsible for some of Israel's greatest disaster in her history.³ He runs as fast as he can, away from the presence of Yahweh.⁴ At Joppa he boards a ship for Tarshish (1:3),⁵ which lay in precisely the opposite direction from Nineveh at the other end of the Mediterranean.

Yahweh, however, causes a great storm to arise and thus threatens to wreck the ship (1:4). The panic-stricken

³The Northern Kingdom was totally destroyed in 722/21 B.C., and that its tribes disappeared from history (II Kg.17). In the years following, Assyrians devastated the Southern Kingdom, Judah. It was miraculously saved only in the final hour (II Kg.19). Assyria thus remained the object of hatred in Israel's eyes for generations. Nineveh became a symbol of violence and oppression. In the words of H.W.Wolff, "Israel had never suffered so greatly under any other world power", see H.W.Wolff, "Jonah", Currents in Theology and Mission III:1(1976),10. The entire prophecy of Nahum, delivered sometime shortly before Nineveh's downfall in 612 B.C., gives a picture of hatred of this city in the eyes of Israel.

⁴The phrase "away from the presence of Yahweh" has sometimes been interpreted as reflecting the ancient belief that God's presence is "confined to the holy land", for examples, H.C.O. Lanchester, Obadiah and Jonah (Cambridge: University Press, 1918), p.56; J.A.Bewer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah (Edinburgh: Clark, 1951), p.30. There is little evidence to support this view. P.L.Trible, "Studies in the Book of Jonah" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1963), p.267 has correctly argued that Jonah flees not because he believes Yahweh is limited to Palestine but precisely he recognizes Yahweh's power and concern over Nineveh. According to him, the phrase "from the presence of Yahweh" is best understood as the rejection of prophetic call, *ibid.*, p.267.

⁵We are told twice that Jonah runs away "from the presence of Yahweh", and three times "to Tarshish" (all appear in vs 3).

sailors cry out to their gods for help and throw the cargo overboard (1:4-5). Meanwhile, Jonah soundly asleep, is discovered by the captain who is shocked to find that he is not saying his prayer like the rest. The captain says to him, "..... arise, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we do not perish" (1:6). The situation deteriorates. Other measure is taken to find out the real culprit. The sailors begin to draw lots to discover who among them has provoked the gods to such wrath. Jonah is revealed to be the one. He discloses his identity and declares himself to be a worshipper of Yahweh: "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). It is here that the story reaches its climax in which he confesses Yahweh as the God of Israel as well as Nineveh. He admits that it is because of his attempt to escape the responsibility laid upon him by Yahweh that the storms have come upon them. The only hope, therefore, is to throw him overboard, whereupon the storm will cease (1:7-12). Under all circumstances, Jonah seeks death rather than obedience.

Nevertheless, the sailors show concern for Jonah by attempting to find another solution. They are, however, unsuccessful in their attempt to row to land. Realizing that they have no other solution than to throw Jonah overboard, they pray to Jonah's God and remind him that this is Jonah's own decision. They do not want to be held responsible.

So they decide to "take up Jonah and throw him into the sea (1:15a). After throwing Jonah overboard, the storm finally ceases (1:15b).

Jonah is not allowed to escape his mission through his death. Meanwhile, Yahweh prepares a great fish to swallow him so as to bring him safely to land later. Jonah spends three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. During this time he composes a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance.⁶ He is then spewed out on the seashore (1:17-2:10).

For the second time Yahweh commands Jonah to fulfil his mission. "Then the word of Yahweh came to Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and proclaim to it the message that I tell you'" (3:2). This time Jonah obeys. "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of Yahweh"(3:3). He enters into the vast city. It takes him three days to walk through it.

⁶Many scholars have argued that the psalm 2:2-9 which Jonah is represented as reciting in the fish's belly, has been inserted into the Jonah's story by an editor. See B.W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1957), p.504; others argued that it was the author himself who selected this already existing psalm, see T.E.Fretheim, The Message of Jonah (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), pp.20,29. A different position is held by G.M.Landes, "Jonah" in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), Suppl.vol., p.489; also G.M.Landes, "The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah", Interpretation XXII:1 (1967), 3-31; cf.16, 29. Landes, on the basis of symmetrical structure, argued that the psalm is integral to the entire story.

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Jonah begins to preach to the wicked city, only to be shocked that his preaching is so successful. The whole city repents at the foreign prophet's message. The "king of Nineveh"⁷ arises from his throne (3:6) and removes his robe. A royal proclamation is called for a general act of national penitence, in which even the domestic animals participate (3:7-8). The hope is that Yahweh's wrath may be averted through this national penitence.

Moved by this conversion, God changes his mind with regards to the threatened destruction. "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God repented of the evil which he has said he would do to them; and he did not do it"(3:10). This arouses the bitter anger of his prophet. The first round of dialogue between Yahweh and Jonah begins:

I pray thee, Yahweh, is not this what I said when I was in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil (4:2).

His real concern is that the hated gentiles would not be destroyed. Now Jonah prays for death rather than live to see the gentiles admitted to Yahweh's favour. "Do you do well to be angry?" Yahweh asks. On the outskirts of the city, he makes a booth for himself, and sits down there under protective shade to observe

⁷The author gives no name to the king, but simply calls him "king of Nineveh", a designation which was never used as long as the Assyrian empire stood. Contemporary writers always speak of the ruler as "the king of Assyria"(II Kg.18:9,13,16,19) or "king of kings", never as "the king of Nineveh". See Andre' and Pierre-Lacocque, The Jonah Complex (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), p.74. To call "the king of Nineveh" is just the same as calling "the Queen of London" or "the President of Washington".

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what happen. God does not fulfil the prophet's wish to let him die in his anger. On the contrary he causes a large plant, perhaps a castor-oil plant to grow up overnight as an umbrella over Jonah's head; the prophet welcomes it as a shelter from the burning heat of the sun (4:6). But on the next day, God appoints a worm to attack the plant and destroy it, thus exposing Jonah to the merciless heat of the sun. It is here that the second round of dialogue between Jonah and Yahweh begins. Jonah asks to die again for the second time: "it is better for me to die than to live"(4:8). His real concern is for the plant. The book concludes with a rebuke by God:

Do you do well to be angry for the plant?....You pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?(4:10-11).⁸

⁸It is not this writer's intention to discuss in great details regarding the literary genre of the book. However, a brief discussion has to be mentioned here. The Book of Jonah should not be understood historically. The attempt of some older expositors, such as E.B.Pusey and C.von Orelli, to defend the book as literary history has been rejected as untenable. B.S. Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament (Philadelphia:Fortress Press, 1979), p.419, prefers to designate the book as a "parable-like" literary genre. Others such as W.Neil, "The Book of Jonah" in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955) II, 967 would regard the book as an allegory. In this interpretation, Jonah is Israel; his involuntary sojourn in the belly of the fish represents the Babylonian exile of the people of Judah; his ejection to the shore represents their liberation and return to Palestine. E.M.Good, Irony in the Old Testament (London: SPCK Press, 1965), p.40, correctly says that "some pieces of the story will not fit any allegorical mold". For instance, that Jonah's attitude in telling the sailors to throw him into the sea does not resemble that of the chosen people in exile, and the fish is not an instrument of punishment but of deliverance. In short, the Book of Jonah does

C. THE UNIVERSALISTIC CONCEPT

The particularistic tendency of the Book of Deuteronomy does not represent the whole of the Old Testament thought. We have other voices as well in the Old Testament, namely, the universal understanding of God as creator and sustainer of the world. In the words of prophet Jonah, Yahweh is "the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land"(1:9b). The place of the nations in the divine economy was never suppressed in the Old Testament. H.G.May is right in one way in saying,

When one analyses the biblical literature with attention to the problem of universalism, one may find himself surprised at its prevalence.⁹

A sense of universalistic perspective is never wholly lost in Israel. The belief is repeatedly expressed in the writing in

not lend itself to convincing allegorical interpretation. R.B. Y. Scott, "The Sign of Jonah", Interpretation, XIX:1(1965), 16 identified the literary form of the book as a parable with elements of allegory, his view is shared by others, such as J. Smart, "The Book of Jonah" in Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956) VI, 272. The weakness of such interpretation is that almost all the Old Testament parables make their point inescapable by including usually in the last verse an explicit explanation of the meaning of the story. The author of Jonah gives us no such explanation epilogue. M.Burrows, "The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah" in Translating and Understanding the Old Testament (New York: Abingdon Press, 1970), p.95f, following the suggestion of A.Lods and H.W.Wolff, classified the book under the category of satire. This writer prefers to use the broad term "didactic narrative" to define the genre. The book clearly focuses on the didactic element, omitting all extraneous material and ending abruptly once the lesson has been taught.

⁹See H.G.May, "Theological Universalism in the Old Testament", Journal of Bible and Religion, XVI: 2 (1948),

the time of the early monarchy¹⁰ and especially in the late-exilic period.¹¹ The Book of Jonah belongs to the post-exilic period of the Old Testament writing,¹² and it represents the voice of the Old Testament which expresses this kind of universalism.

1. The Message of the Book of Jonah: A Symbol of Israel and Her Mission.

According to J.H. Stek,¹³

Jonah is undoubtedly portrayed in some kind of representative role it is unmistakably the people of Israel.

cf. H.N. Orlinsky, "National-Universalism and Internationalism in Ancient Israel" in Translating and Understanding the Old Testament (New York: Abingdon Press, 1970), pp. 206-236; more recently, see R. Knierim, "The Spirituality of the Old Testament: As Global Responsibility" (unpublished paper, Claremont, pp. 1-61).

¹⁰In the time of early monarchy, Yahweh appears in Israel's theology as the God of the world. The evidence is, from the Yahwist historical work in which Yahweh is no longer the God of Israel alone, but he is the creator of the world, its sustainer and the Lord of history, *ibid.*, p. 47.

¹¹Other books in the Old Testament belonged to the exilic-period expressed the universal understanding of God's mercy toward the nations are found in the Book of Ruth and Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 40-55).

¹²Most scholars agree that the Book of Jonah belongs to the post-exilic period. See Bewer, p. 12; R.E. Murphy, "The Book of Jonah", The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 480; Smart, p. 873; Fretheim, Message, p. 4; Landes, "Jonah", p. 496 assigns the book to the 6th century B.C. Such an early dating does not yield much support among scholars.

¹³J.H. Stek, "The Message of Jonah", Calvin Theological Journal, IV:1 (April, 1969), 39; also Peter Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 244-245 who argues that the book is in a literary form of allegory. Jonah would represent Israel and Nineveh the world.

There is no reason to doubt that this is exactly what the writer intended.

It is clear that the author of the book sees the prophets (represented by Jonah) as a group of prophets of Yahweh who have distorted his message. In order to prove his point, he uses the story of the prophet to show whether or not Israel is truly yahwistic. For him, whether Israel is truly yahwistic corresponds to whether its theology reflects particularistic or universalistic creation theology.

If the prophet Jonah represents Israel, then he merely represents Israel's particularism. On the other hand, the author of the book tries to convey to his contemporaries the message of Israel's true nature.¹⁴ As a matter of fact, one must say that for the author of the book, the criterion for judging or deciding the understanding or misunderstanding of Israel's true mission is this: Yahweh is the creator of the whole world and the merciful sustainer, and even to include the most lost of the creatures in whose service and for the purpose of which Israel has been called. And ironically, according to what we know, the author of the book is a sage and not a prophet!

Right from the beginning of the book, Jonah has been chosen by Yahweh to be his prophet. "The Word of Yahweh came".

¹⁴Contra Treble's position. Treble, p.265, sees wrongly that the message of Jonah is not a critique of Israel's particularism. He argues that the book does not display any attitude of hatred toward foreigners at any point of the story.

This phrase has been long used by the prophets and has become the mark of their calling (cf. Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Zech. 1:1).¹⁵ The prophet was instituted a prophet not by any ordination or by any membership in a human institution (cf. Amos 7:14), but by God himself speaking to him and commissioning him for a task. The purpose of her election¹⁶ and her task is the execution of the mission. This is emphasized throughout the book, much more than anywhere else in the books of the Old Testament. In the words of Lanchester,¹⁷

It is true that there are passages scattered here and there from Isaiah to Malachi, and more especially in the psalms, which breathe the hope of the conversion of the nations. But nowhere are the nations viewed in a more favourable light than in Jonah.

Unlike many of the Old Testament prophets who are primarily commissioned to preach to the Israelites in the time of a particular historical crisis, Jonah is called to preach to Nineveh, a symbol of violence and oppression and the worst in the pagan world. Through his use of Nineveh, the author seems to convey that if the message Jonah is to bring will have effect upon Nineveh, it can have an effect upon everybody. If God is concerned that even his word must

¹⁵Smart, p.875.

¹⁶Although the terminology "election" does not appear in the book at all, but the book as a whole reflects this consciousness of Israel's election for the sole purpose of her mission. As we have already observed, word is intrinsically related to the concept. Though the word does not appear, the concept is apparently evident in the story of Jonah.

¹⁷Lanchester, p.46.

be heard in Nineveh of all places, he must care enough to want his word to be heard everywhere. Just as prophet Jonah is thought to be Israel, his mission to Nineveh is to be understood as Israel's mission to the world.¹⁸

Our outline of the story has shown us that Jonah tries to avoid carrying God's message to Nineveh, because he is sure that God's mercy will never allow it to be carried out. The prophet Jonah does not share the broad view of the author. He is obviously of the same mind as Nahum, who rejoices over the downfall of the ancient enemy in the celebrated psalm in the third chapter of his prophecy. Jonah attempts to run away to the uttermost part of the earth.¹⁹ When Jonah

¹⁸See Rowley, p.67; Lanchester, p.45; also see Stek, p.39. Stek says that "God's pity on Nineveh is presented as indicative of his 'pity' on all nations". May, p.103 also sees Nineveh as a symbol for any or all the nations.

¹⁹The whole question of Jonah's problem with God, according to Fretheim, is the question of the justice of God. Jonah cannot tolerate God's slowness to anger toward Nineveh, for she has taken up the sword and should perish by the sword. As it was with the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C. (II Kg.17:17) and with Judah in 587 B.C. (II Kg.24:3-4), so should it be with Nineveh. Any other course of action on God's part would be considered as unjust. Therefore, to prophet Jonah, the wicked people such as the Ninevites should be excluded from the possibility of responding positively to the word of God. They should be allowed to suffer the consequence of their own behavior without a chance for deliverance. The author of the book disagrees with Jonah. The basis of his argument is that Jonah is creature, not creator. So he has no right to judge his fellow creatures. God as creator is sovereign and he has the right to do what he pleases regarding Nineveh, or anyone else. See Fretheim, "Jonah Theodicy", Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, XCV:2 (1978), 227f, and also Fretheim, Message, pp.23ff.

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refuses the mission to which he is called, he is swallowed by the fish for his discipline, and he is sent out again. The task is to summon to repentance those who are not the covenant people, and God needs his messengers. For the author of the book, his chosen people has the responsibility for the universal salvation of humanity, and that they must act accordingly if they want to be the people of this universal God.²⁰

The last chapter introduces a further thought of the inclusiveness of God's dealing with humanity as a whole. By his own feeling of selfish pain at the destruction of the plant which God has prepared to shelter him, Jonah is led to the conception of the actual pain that it causes the heart of God to carry his message of doom.

And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from the left, and also much cattle (4:11).²¹

With this question, the Book of Jonah closes. The story ends

²⁰R.E.Clements in his paper "The Purpose of the Book of Jonah", Vetus Testamentum, XXVIII (1975), 16-28 argued against this view. According to him, "it is not clear that the message of the book can be properly said to imply a need for missionary action of any kind". The purpose, he says, is the assertion to Israel of the possibility of repentance. To him, it is a story of the relationship between God and humanity, not between Jews and gentiles. Clements sums up his conclusion: the purpose of the book is to show that such a way of salvation was a possibility for Israel, *ibid.*, p.22. Clements' conclusion seems hardly convincing.

²¹Fretheim, "Jonah and Theodicy", p.230, has observed that the final verse of the book demonstrates that compassion is supreme in God's way of dealing with his creatures. According to him, it is a universal compassion, extended to all of them equally.

rather abruptly. Jonah's ties to the plant stands in contrast to God's relationship to Nineveh. We may ask, does Jonah repent of his stubborn opposition to the universality of God's grace? Jonah does not answer this question at all. He, like Job (Job 40:3,4) is silenced in front of God, yet his very silence on this point speaks louder than words itself.

Quaintly as the lesson is conveyed, there is, perhaps, no passage in the Old Testament which comes closer to the gospel message than the message of the Book of Jonah. Throughout the book, we hear the question again and again, "is God the God of Israel only? Is he not the God of gentiles also?" And the book through prophet Jonah clearly gives us the answer: yes, of gentiles also!²²

2. Creation and Universalism.

We shall mention also the universal aspect of the Book of Jonah in relation to the creation theology. As Prof. Knierim²³ has rightly pointed out, that creation theology, rather than liberation theology, reflects throughout the Book of Jonah.

²²Rom.3:29. The thought is clearly reflected in the New Testament, that God is the God of Jews as well as the gentiles. Cf. Rom.9:24; 11:11; Gal.4:14.

²³Class lecture, Feb., 16, 1981.

In the Book of Jonah, Yahweh is understood as the "God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land"(1:9; cf. Pss.65:5-7; 107:23-32; 139:7-12).²⁴ The author's conception of God starts from his faith in God as the God of heavens and earth, rather than the God of Israel.²⁵ Throughout the book, Yahweh is not only said to be in control of humanity, but also of the natural phenomenon. He is the God who "hurls a great wind upon the sea"(1:4), the one who "quiets down" the sea (1:15), the one who "appoints a great fish to swallow up Jonah"(1:17), who "appoints" the fish to vomit Jonah on the dry land (2:10). The God of the sea who can produce a fish to swallow Jonah is also the God of the earth and its plants. He "appoints" a plant and makes it come up over Jonah and be a shade over his head (4:6); and later "appoints" a worm to destroy the plant (4:7).²⁶ He also appoints a sultry east wind (4:8) and the last but not the least, he spares the Ninevites (4:11).²⁷ In all these instances, the author

²⁴Although the epithet "God of heavens" is an ancient name for God, it sprang into popularity in the Persian period after exile. See L.C.Allen, The Books of Joel, Jonah and Micah (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p.209.

²⁵Prof. Knierim, Class Lecture, Feb.16, 1981.

²⁶The argument of this text is from creation to compassion. Nineveh is to God what the plant has become to Jonah. If Jonah pities the plant, which he neither created nor nourished nor known, then certainly God should pity Nineveh (and, by logical extension, to all creatures) because he has in fact created them, provided for them and known their needs.

²⁷According to Allen, p.232, Jonah 4:5-10 God plays the role of creator. Here he uses the world of plants and

understands Yahweh as the creator of the whole universe. ⁴⁰ He is indeed the God of the sea and dry land, of Israel as well as the gentiles.

This follows immediately that if God is the creator of the universe, then he must at the same time be God the sustainer (cf. Pss. 2; 8; 19; 24; 29; 33; 46; 47; 49; 50; 65; 66; 67; 82; 90; 96; 99; 104; 113; 115; 117; 135; 136; 145; 148), ²⁸ the God who has concern for the nations outside Israel. If Yahweh destroys Nineveh who are also his creatures, then he ceases to be the sustainer of the world. The creator is necessarily the universal saviour, or else he ceases to be the creator. ²⁹ One of the problems with Jonah is that he cannot see the connection between saviour and creation. He tries to exclude one from another. The author of the book, however, understands correctly that the two natures of God -- creator and saviour are inseparably linked together.

insects, sun and wind to fulfil his purposes. God also deals with the foreigners. The gracious God of Jonah the Jew acted as the creator of all humanity.

²⁸ Compare the promise of God to Noah. In his promise, God will not destroy the earth again (Gen. 9:12-17).

²⁹ It is interesting to note that both the Yahwist and the priestly writer make the creation the very beginning of a history. According to the priestly theology, in order to speak of Israel properly, one has to begin with creation itself, see Rad, Old Testament Theology, I, p. 450; cf. the divine utterances in the Book of Job (Job 38:1-40:5). The story of the election of Abraham must be understood in the context of creation. One must break through the limits of Israelite history to go back to the creation in order to understand God's purpose for humanity as a whole. On the importance of creation theology over the theology of history, see R. Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology", Horizons in Biblical Theology, III:1 (1981) 12ff.

3. Monotheism and Universalism.

Another expression of universalism in the Book of Jonah is the emphasis of monotheism. Monotheism, according to May,³⁰ implies universalism. If God is one and there is no other, then he must first of all, be the God of all humanity, before he is the God of one people, and all humans must have direct access to this one God. This is expressed explicitly in the story of the mariners, each of them cries to their gods with no effect. The reason is obvious, their gods are not the true God, not the God of the heavens who made the sea and the dry land. Then we are told that the heathen sailors pray to Jonah's God following Jonah's advice. Triggered by God's action when the sea grows calm and ceases from its fury, we are told that the men "fear Yahweh exceedingly",³¹ and they "offer a sacrifice to him and make vows"(1:16). The suggestion is that they acknowledge this one true God, rather than their gods who do not answer their prayer.

The Book of Jonah reaches its climax in the story of the repentance of the Ninevites. After Jonah has proclaimed the message of judgment, the people of Nineveh believe in

³⁰May, pp.100-107.

³¹The use of the word "fear" indicates that the author wishes to speak of their conversion to Jonah's God. See Fretheim, Message, p.90.

God. All of them without any exception, the king, the people and the beasts, repent and turn to this one true God.

In short, the thought of monotheism is throughout the Book of Jonah. The thought also implies universalism, that God is indeed the God of the whole earth. He is the only God of humanity, the God of both Israel and the gentiles.

4. The Name Yahweh-God Universalism.

Another expression of universalism in the Book of Jonah is the use of the terminology for God. The king of Nineveh uses the general name for God. He uses "God"(Elohim) instead of "Yahweh" (3:8-9), so does the author in 3:10;4:7-9. As we know, Yahweh is the specific name of God known only to Israel.

H.W.Wolff³² has observed that the general name "God" is used in the passages cited earlier, but in 1:1f;2:1;3:1 the specific name "Yahweh" is used instead. In the transition from the style of speech in 4:4 to that 4:7, the author uses the combined form in 4:6 "Yahweh-God". It seems to be the intention of the author to bring up this correlation, that the heathen world knows the universal God but not Israel! It is just like the story of the prodigal son in the New Testament,

³²H.W.Wolff, "Jonah --The Messenger Who Grumbled", Currents in Theology and Mission, III:3 (1976), 145.

that at the end of the parable, the elder brother turns out⁴³
to be the real prodigal son!³³

It is not unlikely that "God" is used intentionally instead of Yahweh, particularly at the later part of the book. The indication is that God should be properly understood as the God of all nations. He is the God of Israel as well as the gentiles. He is not the God of Israel alone.

5. Universalism Beyond Locality and Race.

Finally, the missionary message in the Book of Jonah is in a broad rather than a narrow sense. In Micah (4:1-14) and First Isaiah (2:2-4), universalism is centralized in Zion. In contrast to these passages, the Book of Jonah advocates that the heathens do not come to Jerusalem in their worship and make a vow (1:7) on the ship, away from the religious center at Jerusalem. The Ninevites can also proclaim a fast and put on sackcloth and sit in ashes and "cry mightily to God" (3:8). God listens to their cry and repents of the evil which he has said he will do to them. All these acts of worship take place in a foreign nation, not in Jerusalem.

Again, in the body of the fish, Jonah can still turn to the "holy temple"(2:4,7).³⁴ What the prophet stresses is

³³Ibid.

³⁴By "holy temple" the earthly temple is meant, rather than the "heavenly temple", contra Landes' view, see Landes,

not so much the location but the general conversion of the heart which one can truly turn to God. The temple is as much as in the fish's belly as it is in the Zion. Jonah faces his God in a private I-Thou dialogue. God meets Jonah in his "exile".

The universalism of the Book of Jonah also goes beyond proselytism;³⁵ it comprehends the conversion of Nineveh, a symbol of the entire nations to the worship of the universal God, without becoming Jews or accepting the culture or the custom of the Jewish people. They worship God but remain gentiles. It involves a complete break with national particularism. There is at least no suggestion anywhere in the Book of Jonah, that the gentile nations must become sons of Abraham by accepting the rite of circumcision. This is required of proselytes under the regulations in the legal code (Ex.12:48).

"The Kerygma", p.21, n.59.

³⁵Proselytism means that once a person becomes a christian, he or she has to become incorporated into Judaism, by accepting the obligations of the law and being circumcised. This was the issue raised by Paul before the Jerusalem Council in A.D.50 (Acts 15; Gal.2).

CHAPTER III

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF ELECTION IN THE BOOK OF
DEUTERONOMY AND THE BOOK OF JONAH

We have already discussed the concept of election in the Book of Deuteronomy and the Book of Jonah in Chapter One and Chapter Two respectively. In this chapter, we shall proceed to compare and contrast the concept of election which we have dealt with in the previous chapters. We shall highlight the different views of Israel's election in the Book of Deuteronomy and the Book of Jonah, with special attention on its particularism and universalism.

1. To begin with, we shall first compare the concept of God before we proceed any further. It is true that in both the Book of Deuteronomy and the Book of Jonah, God is conceived to be one. We have noted that monotheism is characterized in the Book of Deuteronomy. The well-known shema has fully expressed the idea of the oneness of God:

Hear O Israel: Yahweh our God is one, and you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (Dt.6:4).¹

Similarly, in the Book of Jonah, the same idea is emphasized, namely, there is only one true God, the God of

¹Other passages such as Dt.4:35; 32:39 also give expression to the monotheistic view of God.

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the heavens, the maker of the seas and the dry land. He is the God who answers prayer (compared to the gods of the mariners who do not answer prayer), the God who has pity for all creatures, the God of both Israel and the Ninevites. As far as monotheism is concerned, we can be quite certain that both the books share the same conviction.

2. Although there is a common ground in the affirmation of monotheism in both of these two books, yet there is a difference in each emphasis. The name "Yahweh your God" or "Yahweh our God"(Elohim) appears no less than 300 times in the Book of Deuteronomy. Very seldom is the general name "God" used in the book. When the name "God" is introduced, it is generally referred to in a very particularistic sense, such as:

Eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms, and he thrust out the enemy before you, and said, Destroy (Dt.32:27).

Again, in Dt.25:18, Amalekites are said to be the people "who did not fear God" and as such when the Israelites take possession of the land, they are reminded to blot them out.²

Likewise, in the book of Jonah, Yahweh is also conceived to be the only one true God. But this one true God is said to be the God of all humanity. We have noted that the name "Yahweh" eventually turns out to be "Yahweh-God"(Jon.4:6)

²Other passages in which the divine name "God"(Elohim) is used, for instances, in Dt.4:32,34. All these passages also reflect the idea that God is the God of Israel alone.

and finally as "God of all humanity"(Jon.3:8-9; 3:10; 4:7-9)⁴⁷. Through this expression of the divine name, the author of the Book of Jonah indicates that Yahweh is the God of all nations, and Israel's election stands in the service of God's care for the nations.

3. This leads immediately to our next point that in the Book of Deuteronomy, God seems to act only on behalf of Israel. He is understood to be the God who chooses the people of Israel as his "peculiar people" or his private possession. His mercy and love are limited to this particular people alone and do not include others, especially the Canaanites and Amalekites. In the Book of Deuteronomy, the attitude of Israel toward other nations reflects considerable exclusiveness and particularism. Yahweh fights for Israel in the conquest just as he fought for her in the exodus. He drives out their enemies before Israel (Dt.7:17-24; 20:1-4; 31:3-8). He is constantly at war with the enemies of Israel. Unlike in the exodus, Yahweh fights an offensive rather than a defensive war with Israel's neighbours from time to time, and often destroys them thoroughly. In so doing, the Israelites may live uncontaminated away from their neighbours.

In the Book of Jonah, however, we encounter a completely different picture altogether. Here God is said to be merciful towards all nations. In a sharp contrast to Deuteronomic particularism, the message of Jonah shows God's mercy to include even Israel's greatest enemy, namely, the Ninevites.

Here God's love and mercy are to be extended to them. The author affirms that all people are in the salvific purpose of this universal God. God's pity is to embrace all his creatures, cattle as well as men, young as well as old, gentiles as well as Israel. Again and again the story reflects the notion that God is indeed the God of all humanity.

4. In the Book of Deuteronomy, there is absolutely no mention whatsoever of Israel being a servant or a light to the nations. It is here that particularism is reflected most explicitly. The chosen people of God merely enjoy a sort of special privilege and divine favouritism, without having any specific task to fulfil.

The Book of Jonah, on the contrary, presents us with a universalistic view point. Here Israel's calling as God's chosen people is not the mark of divine favouritism, but a summon to fulfil a specific task. It is true that Israel, as represented by the prophet Jonah, is said to be the messenger of judgment, but the messenger of judgment is also the messenger of grace. In other words, Israel is the instrument by which God's blessings and grace are to be mediated to other nations.³ The rejection of the purpose of the election would involve the abandonment of the election. Israel has the salvific universal responsibility, and she must act accordingly

³The emphasis in the Book of Jonah is that through Israel alone can grace and blessings be mediated to the nations.

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if she wants to be a people of this universal God. This is the broad affirmation of the Book of Jonah on Israel's responsibility in comparison to the narrow understanding of the Book of Deuteronomy regarding Israel's role as the chosen people of God.

5. In the Book of Deuteronomy, the creation language has been used such as in Dt.10:14 "Behold, to Yahweh your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it". It seems that in this passage God's universal dominion is affirmed. But this seemingly universal dominion of Yahweh somehow reflects only its particularistic and narrow sense of God's dealing with the world. Immediately following this verse, we are told that "Yahweh set his heart in love upon your fathers and chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples as at this day"(vs 15). There is nothing mentioned whatsoever either explicitly or implicitly of the chosen people being a blessing to the nations.

The other passage which needs our attention is Dt.

4:32:

For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has happened or was ever heard of.⁴

⁴According to A.D.H.Mayes, Deuteronomy (London: Marshall, 1979), p.157, this verse is the only allusion to creation in Deuteronomy.

Although the text speaks of the creation theology -- the creation of humanity by God, the emphasis here is that it is to Israel and not to other nations that this knowledge has been revealed (Dt.4:34-35). From these two texts, we can conclude that the creation theology is understood in a very narrow sense in the Book of Deuteronomy.

This is certainly not the case in the creation theology in the Book of Jonah. Our study has shown that the creation theology in the Book of Jonah is the expression of the universal God and his grace to nations. It is through the creation theology that the author attempts to convey to his readers this idea: that since God is the creator of the universe, the seas and the earth, he is also the creator of all humanity, both the nations and Israel. And since he is the creator of the whole universe, he must, simultaneously, be the saviour and the sustainer of all his creatures, including Nineveh, the wicked nation.

We conclude by saying that in the Book of Deuteronomy, the concept of creation, if there is any, only reflects Yahweh's particularism towards his chosen people Israel. On the contrary, in the Book of Jonah, the creation theology reflects God's universal love for all humanity.

6. Finally, as we have mentioned, the worship at the central shrine is of great importance in the Book of Deuteronomy. We have pointed out that this is an expression of its

particularism. Since Israel is thought to be the imperial nation of the world, other nations have by no means any access to worship this one true God who has his only sanctuary in Jerusalem. Even if the nations were allowed to worship Yahweh, the one true God, they have no other alternative but to flow to Jerusalem to call upon his name there.

Conversely, the God in the Book of Jonah can be worshipped apart from the religious centre in Jerusalem. The heathens need not come to Jerusalem to worship him. This is demonstrated in the experience of the sailors, Jonah himself and the Ninevites. They could pray to this God or offer sacrifice or make vows, either in the boat or the fish's belly or in a foreign nation. God readily hears their prayers. God meets all of them, regardless of locality and nationality. God is present in all these places because he is, according to the author of the book, the universal God, the God of the whole world.

CHAPTER IV

THE CURRENT METHODOLOGY OF BIBLE STUDY IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

In this chapter, this writer attempts to survey the current methodology of bible reading in South-East Asia today. The focus will be set upon the method of harmonization of various biblical traditions by our contemporary Chinese writers and preachers. Before we proceed any further, we shall also deal with the reason why the method of harmonization is emphasized.

A. BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD

The general opinion among the contemporary Chinese christians in South-East Asia is that the Bible (both the Old Testament and New Testament) is the inspired Word of God. They affirm strongly that since the Bible is the Word of God, it has contained not even a slightest error. This idea has been shaped by John Sung¹ of China who, during the period of 1935-1939 came to South-East Asia on at least four different occasions for evangelistic and revival meetings.² Sung holds

¹Sung (1901-1944) has been considered as one of the greatest evangelists in the history of Chinese christian church. See Y.L. Liu, "A Brief History of John Sung", The Landstand, VI:1 (1981), 2.

²See John Sung, My Testimony (Hong Kong: Hung Tao Press, 1967), pp.6-8. All literatures cited in this chapter are in Chinese unless otherwise stated. The literatures are mainly published in Hong Kong or Taiwan but are widely used among the Chinese churches or seminaries in South-East Asia today.

on the basis of II Tim.3:16, that the Bible is the Word of God. It has to be regarded as absolutely true. According to him, the Bible is literally inspired by God himself. It has no error, not even a dot or an iota.³

This idea is shared by many contemporary Chinese writers and preachers in South-East Asia today. Chan Soo Lee, for instance, in his book⁴ states that "the Bible is the Word of God, it is not the word of humans". He argues on the ground of II Peter 1:21 and holds that the Bible, like the prophecy in the Old Testament, is directly spoken by God himself. He affirms that the Bible is not only inspired by the Holy Spirit but by God himself.⁵ The role of humans, he insists, is merely the instrument through which God speaks his word. God is the one who literally puts his word into the mouths or the minds of his servants. Through them, God's word is made known to all humanity. So when David wrote the psalms,⁶ it was not David who uttered the words but God himself who spoke through him.⁷ In other words, God is the one directly responsible for all the words in the Bible. He is,

³See Sung, Devotional Messages (Hong Kong: Bellman Press, n.d.), pp.38ff.

⁴Chan Soo Lee, Knowing the Bible (Taiwan:Evangelistic Press, 1979).

⁵Ibid., p.14.

⁶Among Chinese writers or preachers, almost all the psalms are attributed to king David.

⁷Ibid., p.15.

in a sense, the real "author".

It follows that since the Bible is the Word of God and God is the real "author", one must never doubt the accuracy of the Bible. One has to read it with a prayerful heart, believing that every single word written in the Bible is absolute, accurate and true.⁸

B. METHOD OF HARMONIZATION

We have already observed that for the Chinese writers and preachers in South-East Asia, the Bible is understood as the Word of God and therefore it is absolute and accurate. There is harmony in every single page or in every single verse. Any tension or conflict is inconceivable and it will threaten the authority of the Bible. Hence, they make every attempt to harmonize or to explain away any conflict within the Bible.

C.H. Chan⁹, once a seminary teacher and one of the most sought-after preachers in Singapore, holds that the Bible has a harmonious theme, namely, the prediction and the fulfillment of salvation in Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Every single book in the Bible has to be understood in the light of this theme

⁸Other authors who shared the similar view, see C.C. Lee, Faith For Beginners (Taiwan: Evangelical Bookstore, 1979), pp.99-103; C.S. Wong, Vindication (Taiwan: Chinese Christian Mission, 1982), pp.176f.

⁹C.H. Chan, How to Read the Bible (Taiwan: Chinese Evangelistic Christians, 1979).

¹⁰Ibid., p.79.

without which one fails to understand the bible in the true sense of the word.

In their book¹¹ Lukas Tjundra and Kim Sai Tan¹² also share Chan's view. They also assert that there is a central theme in the bible. That central theme, they argue, is none other than Jesus Christ himself. They also insist that the Old Testament has Jesus Christ as the central theme.¹³ One may ask, "how can it be possible for the Old Testament which was written long before Jesus, to have him as the central figure?" The chronological difficulty does not seem to bother Lukas and Tan at all. Instead, they affirm that this is precisely the sign of the mystery of the bible. This is exactly a pointer to the fact that the bible is an inspired Word of God.¹⁴

Both Lukas and Tan also attempt to harmonize the different traditions in the biblical texts. For instance, in Jn.1:8 we have "no one sees God" whereas in Ex.24:10 we have an exactly opposite statement which says, "they (Moses etc.) saw the God of Israel". How can one account for such a

¹¹Lukas Tjundra and Kim Sai Tan, Bible Study and Hermeneutic Made Easy (Hong Kong: Tien Dao, 1981).

¹²Both Lukas and Tan are currently teaching in a theological seminary in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

¹³Ibid., p.79.

¹⁴Ibid., p.118.

a contradictory statement in the bible? By referring to other Old Testament texts, such as Jg.13:20,23, Lukas and Tan insist that God cannot be seen. They argue on the basis of the majority of biblical texts and ignore the fact that within the bible itself there are various traditions. So they conclude that what is said in Ex.24:10 in actual fact is referring to the "revelation of God" and not to God in person. Therefore, what Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders of Israel actually saw was "the revelation of God". What does it mean by "the revelation of God" they do not elaborate.

One of the most groundless interpretation on Gen.2:4-7 is commented by Hin Lien Joe.¹⁵ In his commentary on the creation story of Genesis, he ignores completely the two independent traditions of the creation story which have been generally recognized by Old Testament scholars.¹⁶ He notes that in Gen.1 God created vegetation and plants prior to his creation of humanity (cf.Gen.1:11). Whereas in Gen.2:4b and following we are told:

When no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of field had yet sprung up then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into

¹⁵See Lien Hin Joe, Meditation on Genesis to Ruth (Hong Kong: Bellman Press, 1979).

¹⁶Most Old Testament scholars have agreed that Gen. 1:1- 2:4a belongs to the priestly source and Gen.2:4b-4:26 belongs to the Yahwistic source. See for instance, Norman Habel, Literary Criticism of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp.27f.

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his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (4b-7).

Joe has observed the two apparently contradictory accounts of the order of creation stories. However, he tries to harmonize both traditions of the creation story. He insists that in Gen.24:4-7, the creation of vegetation and plants was indeed prior to the creation of humanity as recorded in Gen.1.¹⁷ Joe explains that we have to go into the geographical background of the Middle-East in order to understand Gen.2:4-7. In the Middle-East, he says, the climate is so dry and most part of the land is uncultivated; and as such, plants and vegetation do not seem to grow. In Gen.2:4-7 even after God has created vegetation and plants there does not seem to be any around after the creation of humanity.¹⁸ Joe also finds that such interpretation fits into the story of the Garden of Eden. He stresses that this is precisely the reason why God has to prepare a Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve. Joe makes no attempt to study, let alone to differentiate the different terminologies, styles and theological perspectives in Gen.1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-4:26, as most source critics do.¹⁹

Lukas, Tan and Joe represent the Chinese writers and preachers in South-East Asia who employ the method of harmo-

¹⁷Joe, p.14.

¹⁸Joe, p.14.

¹⁹Many Chinese writers, like Joe, believe that Moses is the sole author of the Pentateuch.

nization in their teaching, preaching and bible studying in the past and the present.

C. COMMENTARIES

Before we conclude this chapter, we need to investigate the general opinion of the Chinese view on the Book of Jonah and the Book of Deuteronomy.²⁰ Our concern here is with the question: in what way do they see the message of Jonah as an expression of its universalism and the Book of Deuteronomy as an expression of its particularism?

1. The Book of Jonah.

The Chinese writers readily understand the message of Jonah as representing Israel's mission to the nations.²¹ The prophet Jonah is correctly interpreted as the chosen people of God.²² The mission to Nineveh is understood as Israel's

²⁰There are limited materials written by the Chinese writers on this area. There are, however, some materials translated from the English literatures. In this thesis, this writer shall leave out the latter.

²¹For examples, in W.K.Chan, An Outline of the Books of Minor Prophets (Hong Kong: Cheng Shin Press, 1980), p.93; Andrew Song, The Message of Prophets (Hong Kong: Blessing Press, 1981), pp.32f. According to the above writers, the salvation of Jesus Christ is for the whole wide world, to the Jews first and then the gentiles. This idea has been revealed in the Old as well as the New Testaments.

²²A brief discussion on the concept of election as understood by the Chinese writers is required at this juncture. Watchman Nee (1903-1972), a great poet and a very influential christian writer, in his book which is translated into English Changed Into His Likeness (Fort Washington: Christian Litera-

mission to the nations. Israel's election is for a responsibility so that other nations may also be included in the salvific purpose of God. The intention of the message, according to many Chinese writers, is to rebuke the exclusive view of Israel's understanding of other nations. The prophet is condemned through Jonah's refusal to bring the message to Nineveh.²³ That God wants his prophet Jonah to preach to Nineveh is a clear indication that his mercy and graciousness should also include this city, the most wicked one from whom Israel had suffered severely throughout her history. However wicked the people may be, God desires all humanity to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth (cf. II Tim. 2:4); he "wishes that no one should perish, but all should reach repentance" (II Peter 3:9).²⁴

ture Crusade, 1976), p.28 states that God's choice of Noah is his direct way of dealing with the world. But when that failed, he chose Abraham, and eventually Israel, as a more indirect way of dealing with the world. The purpose of the choice, according to him, is to open the door of blessing to all humanity, *ibid.*, p.28. It is the general opinion of the Chinese writers that God's choice of Abraham, and later Israel, is out of his own willingness. It was God who took the initiative. He chose, in the word of Nee, "for no other reason than God was pleased to choose them", *ibid.*, p.27. The sovereignty of God's choice is also discussed in the little booklet by C.H.Chao, Election (Hong Kong: Evangelical Press, 1978), pp.1-35. Chao's approach, however, is mainly from the New Testament point of view.

²³Song, p.33; also Y.C.Ma, Old Testament Survey (Taiwan: China Evangelistic Christians, 1980), p.300.

²⁴T.C.Yang, Commentary on Jonah (Hong Kong: Alliance Press, 1969), p.10. To the knowledge of this writer, Yang's commentary is the only one of its kind in Chinese. Other commentaries are mainly translated from English, such as Halley's Bible Hand Book, trans.Andrew Song, (Hong Kong: Christ-

Unfortunately, most Chinese writers, if not all, fail to see the importance of the creation theology as an expression of its universal perspective. They make no attempt to address this question in relation to the creation theology.

In sum, the Chinese writers in South-East Asia today generally agree that the message of Jonah is the message of God's universal love for all humanity. Israel's election is for a salvific purpose of God so that all nations may be blessed through them.²⁵

2. The Book of Deuteronomy.

Most Chinese writers accept Israel as the chosen people of God and as his private possession. Yahweh's love is in a way very special to Israel:

Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
that flutters over its young
Spreading out its wings, catching them
bearing them on its pinions.
Yahweh alone did lead him,
and there was no foreign God with him (Dt.3:11-12).

ian Witness, 1954). There is an urgent need for original work in this area.

²⁵Most interpreters take the story of Jonah historically. They even argued that the story of Jonah in the fish's belly is to be interpreted literally and historically. For example, Yang, p.15ff. The argument is based on what we have discussed earlier on the bible as the Word of God, see above, p.52. Another weakness of Chinese interpretation which lacks historical basis is this, Jonah is understood as a symbol for "Israel", he is also understood as representing "Jesus Christ". Jonah's willingness to be thrown into the sea is a prediction of Jesus' willingness to die for our sin. Yang, p.12.

Israel therefore need not fear, for it is Yahweh who protects her and fights for her (cf. Dt. 3:21-22).²⁶

Most Chinese writers do not address the question of the particularistic expression in the Book of Deuteronomy. According to Jason Linn²⁷ Israel is indeed the chosen people of Yahweh, the holy people. He holds that Israel's brutal acts towards the Canaanites and Amalekites is legitimate,²⁸ the reason being that both Canaanites and Amalekites are wicked people. Hence Israel shall have no mercy on them, but to destroy them thoroughly. Since Israel is a holy people, they should have nothing to do with them. They should make no covenant with them nor marry them.²⁹ Linn further points out that Israel's warfare with its neighbours should be viewed as a warfare between good and evil, between God and the pagan gods, and not so much between Israel and her neighbours. Israel is to be perceived as the "army of Yahweh" fighting on behalf of their God to punish the wicked people.³⁰ The uni-

²⁶Yu Ming Chia, The Essential Meaning of the Bible (Hong Kong: Bellman Press, 1980), p.443.

²⁷Jason Linn, Bible Summary: Old Testament (Hong Kong: Alliance Press, 1974).

²⁸See Ma, p.56; also Andrew Song, From Egypt to Canaan (Hong Kong: Morning Light Press, 1971), p.88.

²⁹Hee Enk Chen has falsely claimed without any biblical basis that God wants to prepare Israel's purity, in order to prepare the coming of Jesus Christ. See H.E.Chen, A Summary of the Pentateuch (Taiwan: China Sunday School Association Press, 1977), p.303.

³⁰Linn, p.44.

versal dimension of Israel being a blessing to the nations is not discussed or addressed in Linn's writing.

In his book,³¹ Ann Foo Lin raises a legitimate question which he himself does not answer legitimately. He asks, "how can the God of all nations allow his chosen people to destroy the Canaanites so brutally"? He, however, like many Chinese writers, sees the reason in God's favour for his people to judge the wickedness of her neighbours. Lin further substantiates the claim that Canaanites were indeed sinful people who not only worshipped idols but also offered child sacrifices. Hence, a complete destruction of the people is necessary in order that Israel may live uncontaminated away from their presence and their influence. Another reason for the destruction of the Canaanites is given as the faithfulness of Yahweh in his fulfillment of his promise to Abraham.³²

In sum, the Chinese writers readily accept what has been recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy which is part of the Holy Scriptures. By accepting the inspired word of God in the bible they also have to accept the particularistic perspective of the Deuteronomists. Secondly, we also note that the Chinese writers fail to discuss or to relate the exclusive view of the

³¹Ann Foo Lin, The Word of God in History (Taiwan: Sunday School Association Press, 1976).

³²H.E.Chen, p.281; also Joe, p.10. The promise of Abraham in Gen.12:1-3 is not addressed. The question of Israel as a blessing to the nations is ignored completely.

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Deuteronomists to that of the universal theology of the Book of Jonah. They fail to make any comparison or assessment of the two theologies.

CHAPTER V

A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW METHODOLOGY OF BIBLE STUDY IN THE
CHINESE CHURCHES IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

In view of what we have discussed in the previous chapters, we are convinced that the method of harmonization of the bible reading of the Chinese churches in South-East Asia is not the most adequate and appropriate method. In this chapter, it is the intention of this writer to reconsider and to propose a new methodology for the Chinese churches in South-East Asia today. The reason is simply because the bible has a variety of traditions.

A. THE BIBLE HAS A VARIETY OF TRADITIONS

The Chinese writers and preachers in South-East Asia have to recognize the fact that the Old Testament, and also the New Testament, do not present a systematic theology. Rather, it contains a manifold testimony of faith in the one true God and the creator of the universe, written by different authors at different times.

The Torah of Moses, the messages of the prophets, the psalters and the writings of the wise men were equally inspired. The authors were inspired by God as individual persons who adopted the message to the capacities of their hearers and spoke to their historical situation.¹ One simply cannot read

¹H.W.Wolff is right by affirming that we simply can-

a harmonious Old Testament or New Testament theology. There are varieties, multiplicity, diversity and sometimes even contradictions. The Jews of the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament age enjoyed the chorus of various voices in the concert of the divine revelation.²

G.von Rad³ has long reminded us rather sharply that in his opinion, the Old Testament will not submit to a single theme as the key for the unity of biblical theology. Rather, the Old Testament alone reveals various and widely diverse traditions and theologies. James Barr⁴ has also suggested that we are unlikely to find any single conception which will be adequate to state the character of the tradition. He argues correctly that there is no central motif which will act as the "key" in the process of understanding. On the contrary, there

not remove the word from its historical context. The word is addressed to a particular historical movement and not without reference to history. See H.W.Wolff and W.Brueggemann, The Vitality of the Old Testament (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), p.125.

²See Otto Betz, "The Problem of Variety and Unity", Horizons in Biblical Theology, II:1 (1980) 6.

³See von Rad, Old Testament Theology I, cf. pp.105-115. This is also true in the case of New Testament. As Betz has correctly pointed out that "it would be foolish to deny such a variety". He says that "we do not have one but four gospels in the New Testament", *ibid.*, p.6. According to him, the various forms and expressions of faith in the New Testament are primarily due to the Jewish origin of Christianity. *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁴See James Barr, "The Multiplex Nature of the Old Testament Traditions" in Old and New (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp.15f.

are various modes of thought, action and communication, with varying degrees of independence or interdependence.⁵ G.W. Coats⁶ is also very convinced that there is no single heading that will do justice to the whole structure of the Old Testament, much less the unity of the entire canon.⁷

Recently, J.A.Sanders in his book Torah and Canon⁸ has made a bold statement that no one is looking for the unity of the bible these days.⁹ We may not completely agree with I.G.Matthews¹⁰ who listed no fewer than fourteen different "religions" in the Old Testament many of which exist contemporaneously and apparently compete with each other. Nevertheless, it has been observed that there are at least

⁵Ibid., p.15.

⁶See G.W.Coats, "Strife and Reconciliation: Theme in Biblical Theology in the Book of Genesis", Horizons in Biblical Theology, II:1 (1981) 15-38.

⁷Ibid., p.16. Both Barr and Coats are apparently against biblical scholars such as W.Eichrodt who organises his Old Testament theology on the simple heading "covenant" or E.Sellin's "holiness of God" or Wildberger's "election".

⁸See J.A.Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); also J.A. Sanders, "The Bible As Canon", Christian Century XCVIII:39 (December 2, 1981) 1250-1255 for a detailed discussion on the bible's pluralism.

⁹Sanders' statement is both yes and no. Yes in the sense that one simply cannot find a unity in the bible; no in the sense that we do have scholars today who still speak of unity. For instance, Betz, p.13 who insists that we must "break down all barriers and difficulties and to search for the lines leading to unity and harmony"!

¹⁰I.G. Matthews, The Religious Pilgrimage of Israel (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), p.68.

three apparently contradictory strains of thought besides other types of pluralism in the Old Testament -- that of the prophets, that of the priests and that of the wise men. Our study of the Book of Jonah has revealed to us such a contradictory strain of thought between the sage and the prophet.¹¹

Further, our studies have also shown us the totally different perspectives of Yahweh's relation to the universal reality in the Book of Jonah and the Book of Deuteronomy. We have discovered that the concept of Israel as the people of God and her responsibility to the nations has shown such a great contrast in these two books.¹²

As a matter of fact, the Book of Jonah and the Book of Deuteronomy are not the only voices in the Old Testament which express the view of universalism and particularism respectively. Both have either their predecessors, contemporary or followers. The Book of Jonah has its predecessor such as Deutero-Isaiah, his contemporary such as the author of Ruth. The exclusive view of Deuteronomy also has been shared in one way or another by the Book of Ezra, Nehemiah and perhaps also by the Book of Esther.¹³

¹¹See above, p.34.

¹²See above, cf. Chapter III, pp.45f.

¹³The Book of Esther is hardly characterized by broad universalism and tolerant humanity. In fact, the opposite is true. In the words of Luther, "I am so hostile to this book that I could wish that it did not exist at all, for it judaizes too greatly and has much pagan impropriety", cited from H. Bornkamm, Luther and the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p.189.

The christians of the first century, like the rabbis, were aware of the diversity of thoughts and values within the Old Testament itself, and Jesus himself at any rate was willing to quote one part against another (Mk.10:5-7).

In sum, we simply cannot find a unity or harmonious voice in the bible. There are multiple voices which are often contradictory to one another. Harmonization is not the legitimate method. Furthermore, harmonization does not do justice to the bible. We have to look for another alternative and appropriate method in which we can interpret the bible with validity.¹⁴

¹⁴It is not my intention to go into the discussion on the subject: the bible is the Word of God. Since the issue has been raised earlier, see above, pp.52f, we have to deal with it briefly here. We ought to examine what the bible has to say regarding the question of inspiration. The most often quoted passage is II Tim.3:16. If we examine the text carefully, we find that the verse could also be translated "all inspired scriptures is also profitable", see C.H.Dood, The Authority of the Bible (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p.15; also Paul J. Achtemeier, The Inspiration of Scriptures (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), p.106. This translation assumes the adjective "inspired" to be in the attribute position ("inspired scriptures") and would be parallel in structure to the phrase "sacred writings" in the preceding verse (vs 15). If "every inspired scriptures is also profitable", the passage leaves open the question whether inspired scriptures is infallible; that it is profitable, no one would deny it. The other passage commonly quoted by the Chinese writers in this connection is II Peter 1:21 which does not seem to deny the human element in prophecy, and so perhaps by implication claims infallibility for it, though not necessarily for the entire canon. In fact, the bible itself does not make any claim to infallible authority for all its part. On the contrary, some of the writers confess that in some points there have been mistakes. Isaiah corrected his first sweeping prediction of complete disaster in favour of a faithful "remnant" (Isa.6:10, and later changed his position in 30:19; 31:4-9). Ezekiel withdrew his forecast of the fall of Tyre

B. A PROPOSED INTERPRETATION

Our proposal for the bible reading in the Chinese churches in South-East Asia today is, first of all, to recognize the pluralism in the bible. This is a point totally unrecognized by our Chinese christians in South-East Asia during the last decade.

From this perspective, we can agree with Sanders in saying that "to fail to recognize pluralism in the bible is to be dishonest".¹⁵ We may add that to fail to recognize pluralism in the bible one does not understand the bible at

(Ezek.24-28; and later changed his mind in 29:18). Both Haggai (cf.2:20-23) and Zechariah (cf.6:9-18) addressed Zerubbabel as Messiah, the chosen Davidic king who would rule. With the sudden disappearance of Zerubbabel in history, their prophecy and hope immediately crashed to the ground! In the New Testament, Paul sometimes claims to speak the word of the Lord, but at other times he "gives his own opinion" quite tentatively (I Cor.7:8,10,12,25). Hence, when we say that the bible is the Word of God, we have to recognize the human factor or element is involved. The idea that God is "the author" perceived by the Chinese writers and preachers has to be abandoned. We have to agree with J.W.C. Wand, The Authority of the Scriptures (London: Mowbray, 1949), p.62 who says, "inspiration does not put man's common faculties to sleep while God is left alone to speak, but it quickens these faculties beyond the point of genius". In this writer's opinion, the bible has nothing whatsoever to do with infallibility. In fact, the bible is a record also of wrong attempts to love and to serve God. These wrong attempts speak to our condition in the modern world today because again and again we too fall into the same condition ourselves (this writer has in mind the attack and the killing of many civilians in Beirut by the Israelis recently). It is in this sense that the bible, in spite of many weaknesses, is still to be considered as the Word of God.

¹⁵See Sanders, "The Bible As Canon", p.1253.

all! The Chinese christians in South-East Asia today have⁷⁰ learn the very fact that unity does not constitute authority. As a matter of fact, authority is derived from tradition. It is precisely through the handling and adoption of the tradition in a new situation by the believing community that the authority is acknowledged and confirmed. Again, Sanders is right in saying that the bible's pluralism must not be harmonized out of existence.¹⁶

The weakness of his approach, however, is that he does not offer a further interpretation beyond this point. For instance, he says, "we should not absolutize any particular biblical view point or agenda, but to celebrate the richness of the bible's pluralism".¹⁷ In the same page, he argues that we have to affirm the wisdom of the early believing communities in handling down to us the multiple traditions, such as the Book of Nahum and the Book of Jonah in the same prophetic corpus: the former speaks of God's judgment against the Ninevites and the latter speaks of God's grace towards them.

One expects Sanders to offer his readers a further interpretation of such diverse traditions which we have found in the bible, but one is immediately disappointed for he merely stops there. One immediately asks the question: so what? It seems to this writer that what he says is in fact nothing new,

¹⁶Ibid., p.1253

¹⁷Ibid., p.1254

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for von Rad has long ago reminded us of the variety of traditions within the Old Testament itself.

Sanders' method taken by itself is already very different from the way the Chinese Christians read the Bible, hence it would certainly offer a significant new insight for them. However, it does not yet offer them those insights that are necessary for a reading of the Bible in which all the biblical traditions that are considered fundamental can be assessed.

Neither do we find von Rad's "re-telling the story" or confessional approach alone appealing. His approach is one-sided. The question remains: are we just to relate, to re-tell again what the Old Testament has to say without any theological interpretation in a total different context, such as in the context of South-East Asia?¹⁸ Our judgment is that von Rad's method may not go far enough among the Chinese Christians in South-East Asia.¹⁹

¹⁸Von Rad is well aware of the importance of interpretation. In his own words, "there is no sentence in the Old Testament that we do not have to interpret anew". See G. von Rad, "Ancient Word and Living Word: The Preaching of Deuteronomy and Our Preaching", Interpretation XV:1 (1961) 5. Unfortunately, in his interpretation of Israel's warfare with their enemies, he tends to spiritualize the text. He interprets Israel's warfare and her conquest of the land as Christians' spiritual warfare, *ibid.*, p.12.

¹⁹It has been suggested that because of the ambiguous notion of re-telling, von Rad has placed less emphasis on this method in his later years. See G. Hasel, Old Testament: Basic Issues in the Current Debates (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p.25.

Our methodology is then, on the one hand, to take the pluralism of the bible seriously, and on the other hand, to compare and contrast the difference from the vantage point of Yahweh's relationship to the universal reality.²⁰ With this in mind, we shall always ask questions such as: which of the texts reflects Yahweh's relationship to the universal reality and which does not? To what extent do texts possess the potential for a universalistic interpretation even as they speak within the confine of a particular situation as shown by historical exegeses. On the other hand, one has to ask: which text contradicts or resists such a potential universalism? What is the relationship between notions such as liberation and justice, creation and history, Yahweh's concern for Israel and his concern for humanity? Which of these notions qualifies which? And which is qualified by another? As soon as we begin to raise these questions, we will inevitably be guided to identify the theological notion in the bible that will function as the qualifier for other notion, and we will discover a way of bible reading in which both harmonization and the mere recognition of pluralism becomes transcended, and the bible can after all be read again as one.

Let us take the example of the Book of Jonah and the Book of Deuteronomy which we have studied. The answer is

²⁰This method has been proposed by Prof. Knierim and it is rightly so. Class lecture, Feb.26, 1982, Claremont.

quite obvious. The Book of Jonah, as we have observed earlier, reflects the notion that Yahweh is the creator and the sustainer of the world.²¹ On the other hand, the Book of Deuteronomy only reflects particularism. It reflects Yahweh as the nationalistic God of Israel who has nothing much to do with the universal reality.²² Our method is: that which does not reflect Yahweh's relationship to and presence in the universal reality has to be judged and to be placed at the service of that which reflects that relationship and presence. This is because Yahweh is the God of reality, and not of non-reality or an unreal god. One observes immediately that this method is in great contrast to the method of harmonization of the current Chinese approach.²³

Of course, we do not presume to find all the biblical texts which speak about creation or Yahweh as the sustainer of the world in a way that we can discern them easily. Unlike the Book of Jonah, there are many texts in the bible which do not speak of creation or Yahweh as the sustainer of the world explicitly. How, then, shall we account for these texts? This writer believes that even as this is so, it is still possible for us to look for the answer by raising the following questions: Does a text lend itself to reflecting Yahweh's relationship to the world or does it resist such a potential?

²¹See above, pp.38f, 49.

²²See above, pp.15f.

²³See above, pp.54ff.

Does a text reflect Yahweh as the guarantor of universal justice? Or is an universal assumption at work in this particular situation? We believe that with this new discernment, the bible can be studied and interpreted through this methodology.

In sum, this method of bible reading has to go beyond what the bible says and what it does not say. Our task is to interpret the bible critically from a center and background found within it, i.e., from a perspective that reflects God's relationship to reality in the most universal and fundamental way. What is needed, therefore, is a theological interpretation of the messages of the bible from their center: God's relationship to the totality of his world. This task is upon us, its readers, precisely because the bible does not do so.

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